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AUGUST GRAF VON PLATEN, EIN BILD SEINES GEISTIGEN ENTWICKELUNGSGANGES UND SEINES DICTERISCHEN SCHAFFENS. Von Rudolf Schloesser, a. o. Prof. an der Universitaet Jena. Erster Band, 1796-1826; Zweiter Band, 1826-1835. Muenchen 1910 and 1913. R. Piper & Co.

Platen's relative fame among German poets excites as much discussion now as it did among his contemporaries. The modern views concerning the amount of talent he possessed and the worth of his poetry are varied. Bartels places him among the great poets and Richard Meyer calls his work an attempt to translate prose into verse. Probably Platen himself, despite his extravagant claims, found no more satisfying solution than scholars, critics and poets then and now. In his attempts to fix his relative position among writers of the sonnet, the ode, comedy, *Maerchenspiel* and lyric poetry, he showed such a concern about the matter that posterity, probably partly on that account, has continued the discussion. Though he has been called a poet of the fourth class and though his fame has long suffered eclipse he cannot now be, nor is he, ignored. In the last two decades his poetry has busied critics and scholars to a remarkable extent, especially after the publication of the *Tagebuecher* in 1896. Koch's *Zeitschrift fuer vergleichende Literaturgeschichte* took on the character of a *Platenarchiv*. The publication of the *Tagebuecher*, the various investigations it called forth and the Koch and Petzet edition of the poet's works in 1910 cleared the ground for the present exhaustive study of Platen's artistic, poetical and political development. On account of the esoteric and unpopular quality of his poetry Platen cannot be placed among German poets of the first rank, but this work of Schloesser's helps to secure his place among the poets bordering on the greatness of the great, with Herder, Wieland, Grillparzer and Moerike. He cannot again be forgotten or passed over in silence.

The time was ripe for the work and the scholar who early felt the attraction for Platen's poetry and for the story of his development schooled himself long for the task. His articles and reviews satisfied the world and himself that he was the one fitted by application, time and nature to undertake it. When we read in the preface the account of his early predilection for Platen and of his continued interest in him through successive years we can understand how he could not be, or remain, objective in a work which might seem to call for impartiality. Pure objectivity could never have produced a work of the importance of this one; neither, however, of the extent, for we have to admit that to the ordinary student who reads these two volumes there is much that is tedious and seemingly a mere mass of details and even

repetitions. Also it could not have written at all the book on *Venice*. On the other hand, it could not have been more fair in the chapter on Heine. For most of us these are the two most interesting parts of the work.

The first volume of this work consists of five books and the second, of four. Book 1 gives us the facts of Platen's life to 1818, that is, among things of importance, his participation in the military expedition to France in 1815 and his last active years as Bavarian Lieutenant up to the beginning of his studies in Wuerzburg. In Book 2 we follow him through the three semesters there and the first one at Erlangen. Book 3 covers the three years (1821-1824) at Erlangen, under the influence of Schelling, the most important period of Platen's early development. The highest point of interest and importance is reached in Book 4, entitled *Venice*, with all that implies as the turning point of the poet's aims and ideals. The fifth Book gives the account of the last two unhappy years in Germany till 1826. The four Books of Volume II are therefore devoted entirely to the last decade of Platen's life passed as a wanderer in Italy. Book 6 covers the years 1826-1828, the periods of time spent in Rome, Naples, and Florence; Book 7 the wanderings of 1828-1830 through Genoa, Northern Italy, Sienna, Venice, Rome, and Naples; Book 8 the wanderings of 1831-1835 through the same places, filled now, however, no longer with studies in art alone but with a deep, lively and increasing interest in political and historical affairs. The ninth Book gives the review of but one year, the last of Platen's life, and the circumstances of his death in Syracuse on the 5th of December 1835.

Each of these nine Books opens with an account of the outward circumstances of the poet's life during the time in question, then goes on to the studies, influences, impressions and conflicts which moulded and conditioned the poetic productions, leading up, therefore, to the intimate study and appreciation of the productions themselves—the most valuable and important part of the Book. The references in the text are all given with care in the notes which contain a mine of accurate and well-arranged detail. The index (and how few German works such as this one have any at all!) is good but it could have been improved by bringing together the various references to such important questions as have been pointed out and discussed here.

The objection made, that to devote nearly 1300 quarto pages to the life and works of a poet so little known as Platen is well-founded in part. The partial justification is found in the fact that this is not a biography but a picture of the intellectual and artistic development of the poet as well as an account of his poetical creations and productions. However, many of the details are of themselves of little interest and could easily have been dispensed

with. Such are especially the stories of Platen's aimless and restless wanderings in Italy, in the second volume, covering that period of his life when his best work, as we know and have received it, was behind him and when his fame was made and his character and artistic calling definitely moulded and firmly fixed. Also, while after *Venice*, Platen's interest in Italian pictorial art was very great, it was, it seems to us, less important to his poetry and art and the continued detailed account of these studies lead us nowhere in relation to Platen's poetical productions.

It was necessary, of course, that for the sake of completeness an account of Platen's historical writings, *Die Geschichte Neapels*, and various fragments should be included in the limits of this work, but it would seem that less space and time should have been devoted to them seeing that their scientific value is nothing, artistically and poetically they are worth but little more, and for their literary justification they have not the interest of Schiller's historical writings in relation to later poetical works. Had Platen lived longer they may, to be sure, have come to have such literary value. As the case stands they have very little interest to any one.

This work is a labor of love frankly intended to bring into clearer light the facts pertinent to a deeper study and understanding of the poet's work and to aid in the growing appreciation of his poetry. It is in this sense a rehabilitation necessary for the proper understanding of the artistic, formal and beautiful side of Platen's development as evidenced in his poetry. In other words, our better knowledge of the artist in *becoming* will lead to a greater appreciation of his art. The objection of too great detail cannot be applied to that part of every Book which is devoted to an analysis of Platen's poetical products. So fully has no one entered into the spirit of his comedies and *Maerchenspiele*; here the completeness and detail are of the greatest value.

Schloesser has very creditably left to the pathologist and psychopath the deeper study into that form of the erotic which was peculiar to Platen. The subject, however, is not avoided or ignored in those places where comment is necessary in relation to the poetry so often tinged by it.

Of great interest are those sections which refer to the relations which existed between Platen and Goethe. Here Schloesser closely follows Unger (*Platen in seinem Verhaeltniss zu Goethe*, 1903) with important additions and corrections. As in the case of the literary beginnings of most German poets of the last century the influence of Schiller was in Platen's earlier years the stronger. He soon, however, came under the spell of Goethe's poetry, and as early as 1815 while on the expedition to France, Goethe is finally and definitely preferred to Schiller though this attitude did not mean a definite turning away from Schiller. Goethe was early imitated in verse schemes and rhymes. He, along with the French tragedy,

was a force in Platen's early tendencies toward simplicity of treatment; Goethe's *Pandora* opened to him the possibilities of the ancient trimeters and even the pantheism of the *Parzenlied* is derived from Goethe. While during this period of Platen's beginnings there was a time when he preferred to Goethe such varied poets as Voss, Shakespeare and von Heyden, yet in 1820 when he comes strongly under the influence of Romanticism he turns, as did many a poet, to the Master at Weimar. Schloesser shows that three important elements in Platen's development hang closely together and cannot be separated: his oriental studies, his veneration for Goethe and his relations to Romanticism. It was as though Goethe stood as the living embodiment of Platen's ideals. We can only speculate as to how much of a beneficent and steadying influence Goethe would have been to Platen had fate been kind enough to bring them together. Platen called on Goethe in 1821 in Jena, but the visit turned out, because of Goethe's distant and cold manner, to be a purely conventional one and passed without important incident. All of Platen's subsequent efforts to gain the recognition of Goethe failed through a series of unfortunate coincidences which each successive time damaged Platen more and more in Goethe's eyes. Goethe looked upon him, as we hear through Eckermann, as a poet of talent whose efforts were brought to naught by his polemical tendencies. So after Platen had twice offended by attacking critics who happened, without Platen's knowledge of the fact, to be Goethe's warm friends, the older poet dropped the younger coolly and definitely. Platen could not give up the hope of a word of encouragement. Though he sent his poems and dramas to Goethe, the latter made no sign and left the letters unanswered, and Platen eagerly inquired of friends who had gone to Weimar on other matters of business whether the aged poet had by chance made any mention of him. He was at last embittered. He probably never knew of Goethe's final estimate of him, of February 1831, which lays the blame for Platen's want of recognition definitely on his inclination to quarrel with his fellow-poets.

We have also an interesting study of Platen's attitude toward his native land and its rulers under the power of the anti-Napoleonic reaction in Europe. The year 1813 left the youth uncertain in his feelings. In 1815 he was anti-Prussian, yet German through and through. The next year finds him decidedly republican in his views in spite of the disillusionment he experienced in republican Switzerland. In 1817 he hates courts, court-life, and, for her excess of these things, therefore Germany. The following year shows outbursts of hatred of Germany in general and even of his native Bavaria in particular. Like Heine his hatred of Germany is a hatred of Prussia above all, and of Germany under the reaction, though the hatred does not extend to intellectual

Germany. He was like Heine, too, in his veneration of Napoleon, which reached its high-water mark in his case in 1825 in the Napoleon Ode. It was this feeling toward his native land that impelled him to spend the last decade of his life outside of Germany, for the call of Italy was second to the overmastering desire to escape from the domination of the Reaction. This feeling began while a student in Erlangen and lasted without interruption the rest of his life. Not even the distance of Italy lent enchantment. We find in the *Tagebuecher* frequent expression of his hatred of his Fatherland and of his joy at having been able to leave it. Along with this, as was to be expected, grows the impression in his mind that Germany has cast him off, and the impression is based on pretty well established facts. Beginning with the *Verhaengnissvolle Gabel* in 1826 he begins to show in his poetry his participation in the events of the day and to make bitter thrusts at the Reaction. All this hatred of Prussia and of the Reaction is, of course, to us who have his work only the proper preparation for the *Polenlieder* of 1831.

As throwing a sidelight on his artistic development, Platen's religious views and the gradual change in them are of interest. He began life with orthodox and pious views as a result of parental training but he soon turned to rationalistic ideas in religious matters in his early years as a Bavarian officer. It was through his liking for Calderon in 1819 that he came to change to personal religious views and, as always in Platen's life, it was art and poetry which decided the matter. He believed that Spanish Literature and Calderon in particular had succeeded in poetizing Catholicism. In the period of his Romanticism at Erlangen these religious tendencies were strengthened but when, after the stay in Venice, he turned definitely to the antique as the perfection of all art and life, Catholicism and Christianity fell away in favor of an artistic conception of pagan antiquity, as we see in the sonnet to Winckelmann in 1826. But, as in spite of all artistic theories and professed antagonism to Romanticism as well as imitation of and striving after the spirit of classical antiquity, the Romanticist of earlier days never entirely disappeared, but showed itself in various ways every year till the end, so in religious matters reason never entirely got rid of sentiment and feeling and we hear that the impression of the glory and the magnificence of the ceremonies at St. Peters and the Vatican left him wavering in his opinions and he left Rome in 1827 in a mood of reconciliation to religion. So through the later years of his wanderings through Italy religious feeling breaks through as does Romanticism, also a more kindly feeling for intellectual Germany, and he closed his career as a believing Protestant.

The proper view of Platen's religious development can, however, only be understood in connection with his attitude toward

German Romanticism, with which his life was synchronous, and to its antithesis, the cult and influence of classical antiquity. Platen was religious in feeling or not as he was inclined toward Romantic art and poetry or to their opposites and the artistic seemed to decide the religious.

At the age of twenty he learned to know Schlegel's poetry. He was not impressed or attracted by it. At that time, being Protestant in feeling, he seemed to identify Romanticism with Catholicism. For several years he was not only non-romantic but decidedly anti-romantic. During these few years he was interested in eighteenth century English Literature (Pope especially) and in the tragedies of Corneille and Racine. He learned Greek and delighted in Homer. As his literary horizon extended and his range of reading became wider he gradually became acquainted with the literatures of the Romance nations of the south. In 1818 he learned to admire the wit and satire of Gozzi and his intense fondness for Calderon lead him, strange as it may sound to us, not only to a changed attitude toward Catholicism but also to a warm personal attitude toward religion.

It was while in this frame of mind that Platen came to Erlangen at the end of 1819 and there, under the influence of Schuber he turns away from his former rationalistic views. With this change comes a lessened interest in antiquity and a lessened esteem for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was the next year that he came to know Schelling. In the two years in which that influence was strongest we find him an out and out Romanticist. He was so in his warm personal attitude toward Christianity and toward the Catholic church, in his opposition to the *Aufklärung*, in his belief in and striving for the union of poetry and life, in his admiration for medieval poetry, and in his interest in Oriental poetry. Now he came to have a feeling and understanding for the poetry of the elder and later Romanticists in Germany, for the poets of the southern Romance nations and for Shakespeare. While in this frame of mind he visited Nuernberg, the Mecca of all German Romanticists, and there began that admiration for pictorial and plastic art which was to be the deciding motive of his after life. Art was from now on the first and last to be considered and to study and appreciate art was the purpose of that eventful journey to Venice in 1824. Though on the eve of setting out on this journey he was still Christian-romantic in his opinions and though the Venetian Sonnets of 1825 were in the sentimental elegiac tone of a Romanticism heightened above all that had gone before, Venice was none the less the decisive turning point in his relations to Romanticism. Immediately on his return we see a change. Though in 1825 his comedies *Treue um Treue* and *Der Turm mit 7 Pforten* are still romantic, though the poet is still romantic in his judgments of Molière and Shakespeare, and

though his sonnets of that and the next year are romantic in essence, we see, from the beginning of 1825, signs of a gradual but irresistible trend toward antique ideals in art and religion. As soon as he is again on German soil he finds himself repelled by the post-romanticism of the fate-tragedy. While never a warm friend of Catholicism and reserved in his opinion of it during his romantic period, he begins now to criticise and attack the clergy, and the sonnet to Winckelmann in 1826 shows him a convert to the pagan ideas of antiquity. The sonnet on Sophocles marks a stage in the trend toward the antique and with the odes on Napoleon and King Ludwig as well as in the *Verhaengnisvolle Gabel* we are with Platen in the full sway of antique ideals in art, religion and life. At the end of his German period, in 1826, when he set out for Italy he had, in intention, broken definitely with Romanticism and all that it implied, though his later poetical productions could never entirely deny the occasional lapse into romantic traits and ways. The *Romantische Oedipus* is almost as romantic as the men and works it derides and Platen never entirely lost his liking for medieval German literature. But the hostile attitude he arrived at and maintained is seen best in the several epigrams of 1830 which characterize the whole romantic movement as an attempt to beautify the innate ugliness of things modern.

So from 1826 on we see Platen an anti-romanticist and on the soil of Italy he has eyes and appreciation only for the antique and its offspring the Italian Renaissance. All the time between these two periods was to him a time of darkest barbarism and all the time subsequent to the latter, hateful modernity. At times he values the Renaissance above antiquity, thus aiming to set himself free from his guide Winckelmann. He comes into deep sympathy with antique literature, with Anakreon, Homer, and Horace. He attached great importance to the antique character of his own poetry, to his odes, hymns and especially to the hexameters in the eclogues. He was under a double influence in his poetry in the faithful copying of Pindar in the hymns and of Horace in the odes as his models, and in the direction of heightening the musical effect by means of the verse-accent. In the latter respect his attempts seem to have been without lasting influence. It does not correspond to the antique manner whose track it follows, for it sets antique quantity and modern accent on an equal footing, to say nothing of smaller difficulties. Yet that the modern practice of making verse-accent and word-accent coincide is the last word of wisdom and the only practice possible, is not absolutely certain. Platen did not think so and according to Schloesser he should be read as he wished to be, not as modern poetry, but as far as possible according to the antique measures which he set at the heads of his poems and which he intended to be used like notes in music in order to produce in his poetry, on the musical-rhythmic side, a deeper effect than modern poetry ordinarily does.

Schloesser shows us, above all, in scattered parts of the work the development of the formal lyric poet. Platen early desired to be poetically correct and as early declared himself against rhymed verse, as well as against such musical poetry as that of Petrarch. He strove, under the influence of Goethe's Tasso, for greater simplicity in his art. It was, however, after the Venetian journey that he came to realize as never before, even beyond what Schelling had taught, the high mission and supreme glory of art. It was pictorial and plastic art, it is true, but the results of *Venice* translated into terms of his own art, showed a striving for perfection of form. Now he broke with the French classicists and turned consciously to the antique. After *Venice* his whole life, tinged with the dignity and worth of art, belongs to the art of the complete and perfectly formed. The eleven years following 1824 were devoted with singular fidelity to this aim and to these views. In these years originated those works of formal excellence on which, however Platen was known then or is known now, his ultimate fame will rest. Barring the failure of his attempts in the drama, whether because of lack of inner harmony or of lack of confidence in his own ability and in the appreciation of stage and public, these post-Venetian years produced the works of purest formal beauty of the whole range of German Literature, the sonnets, odes, hymns, eclogues and idylls which place Platen first among modern poets who strive for classical and formal antique ideals in art.

When only fifteen Platen tried his hand at the sonnet, and in 1820 on learning to know the works of Camoens, he turned to it decisively. Later he studied the art of it in Shakespeare too. For his Venetian sonnets he took as his immediate models and inspiration the series of *Gemaldesonnetten* written in 1809 by August Wilhelm von Schlegel on the subject of the paintings in the Dresden gallery. However, no actual model was needed for the Venetian sonnets seeing that they originated in the land of the sonnet, in Venice, where it was an especially favorite form of poetry. Platen was, moreover, ambitious to excel in sonnet writing and had been for several years exercising his talents in producing them. These *Sonnetten aus Venedig* are the highest and purest forms of the sonnet in German as well as the high-water mark of Platen's poetical ability. For never before nor after them did impulse, inspiration and productive fervor coincide in Platen's life to such a degree.

The chief period of the ghazal had preceded 1824. Rueckert, not Platen, was the originator of this poetical form in Germany, and the latter, at the suggestion of the former, went to the Oriental sources for his models. After the return to Germany various ghazals were written at different periods of the author's life, especially in Naples in 1832—a temporary return from classical tendencies to the playful romantic mood of the years in Erlangen.

It was to the ode and hymn that the years following *Venice* especially belong. Then were brought forth those forty-two odes which are unique in the history of German literature, for their perfection of form based on the most-used meters of Horace, with all the poetic ornamentation of Platen's mastery. They cover the world of Rome, of ancient Italy and later times, of Popes, Kings, Emperors and contemporary poets, with notes of political freedom, of hatred of Catholicism, of elegiac resignation and of scarcely whispered desire of death. Along with the odes go the eleven hymns (*Festgesaenge*) modeled after those of Pindar. To this heightened and elevated form of poetry belong Platen's last years. The perspective of the hymns is wider and more magnificent than that of the odes, their proportions and divisions as happy and well-constructed, and like the ode they show Platen's preference for and mastery in using mouth-filling phrases and extended similes and metaphors. These were the poems which he considered the highest products of his poetical career and work. It is doubtful whether a longer life could have improved the poet's title to fame above that of these odes and hymns.

From the various references to *Venice* the reader can by now have been left in no doubt but that that section, treating as it does of the turning point of Platen's career, is the center and soul of the work. That it is actually the most important part the most casual reader can easily enough see. When, however, we read the preface we are not surprised to find that that is the nucleus out of which, or rather, around which the biography grew. Probably no better summing up of the tendency and accomplishment of this Life of Platen can be made or found than that which Schloesser gives when he tells us of the genesis of the idea. Recognizing the importance of *Venice*, the original work was to be a detailed account of the outer and inner circumstances of Platen's Italian journey and an exhaustive appreciation of the Venetian sonnets, pieced out with introductory and concluding chapters on the author's previous and later sonnets and his attitude toward pictorial art. The chapters on art were easily written but the introductory chapter on the sonnet could not be written without detailed reference to Platen's relations to Romanticism and to Christianity, and, as their opposites, to Rationalism and to the antique. So the original book was found to be only a chapter of the book that had to be written. Though the work grew infinitely beyond the original intention of the author it did not swamp that intention. The chapter on Venice and the Venetian sonnets is the one we could least afford to miss, and whatever else may become antiquated this will live with the sonnets themselves, for it is the best guide to their perfect understanding and appreciation. Probably the author is too much given to German thoroughness, when in this book on *Venice* he gives chapters to a study of

the poet's relations to sculpture, to architecture and to the theatre and literature in Venice. They might have been omitted without impairing much the value of the work.

Among many incidents we might mention there only remains one phase of Platen's life of interest to all lovers of the poet's work and also to the casual student of German Literature; that is the relations of our poet to his contemporary Heine. Probably no one has yet entered so fully and fairly into the quarrel, as it has been called, or the misunderstanding, which it was, between the two poets, preserved in literature in Platen's *Romantischer Oepidus* and in Heine's *Baeder von Lucca*. All the facts and elements of the affair are given in detail. Platen's extreme sensitiveness is known to all and his jealousy of authors who had greater popular and financial success than he. To explain, not to justify, Platen's somewhat tasteless attacks on Heine in the *Oedipus* and among his epigrams, we are told of Platen's unhappiness at the popularity and success of the *Reisebilder*, his anger at the references to his peculiar conception of friendship by Heine's friend Robert, and at the criticism of his meters by Immermann. However, Platen's attack was not bitter or important enough in itself to explain or justify the intensity and scope of Heine's answer in the *Baeder von Lucca*. Here we are given all the circumstances which led Heine to go the lengths he did. He considered he had good evidence (though Schloesser shows us that Heine was mistaken in his inferences) that Platen was the mouthpiece of a faction in Munich, which had formed a conspiracy against him in order to prevent his being called to a professorship in the University there, and to harm him in other ways. Therefore, the first reasons he had for answering were party ones. On the personal side there were the further reasons of Platen's nobility, and his antique tendencies in poetry—both of them cause for ridicule by Heine in any one unfortunate enough to have them and to incur his displeasure. Further there was the very natural and normal failure of Heine to understand and tolerate Platen's erotic tendencies in their peculiarities and a quite pardonable readiness to satirize his overweening poetic ambitions and his continual discussing and weighing the question of his relative literary fame and his place among German poets.

That the quarrel did not end in the utter crushing of one or the other of the two opponents, as happened when Lessing routed Klotz or when Hauff laughed Clauren out of court, lay not in the lack of intention of the contestants, especially of Heine, but in the fact that both were men of such talent and accomplishment that no such result was possible and the whole strife was but barren in its consequences. Schloesser's review of the facts of the case and his judgments of it are likely to be accepted as final, and his story of it is one of the undoubted merits of the work.

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